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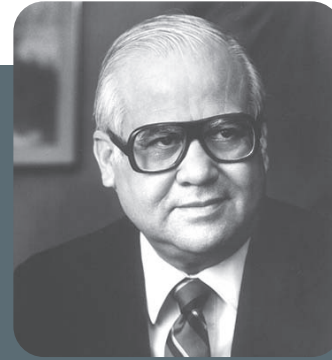
E. Kika De La Garza

Fellowship Program

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E. Kika De La Garza

United States representative
Eighty-ninth - One Hundred Fourth Congresses
Serving from January 3, 1965 - January 3, 1997

Eligio (Kika) de la Garza was born September 22, 1927 in Mercedes, Texas and passed away at the age of 89 on March 13, 2017.

De La Garza attained his Doctor of Jurisprudence from St. Mary's University Law School in San Antonio, Texas and was admitted into practice as a member of the Texas Bar Association.

De La Garza served six consecutive terms in the Texas House of Representatives before being elected as the first Hispanic congressman from Texas' 15th District. Congressman De La Garza would spend the next 32 years as a leading U.S. representative.

From 1981-1994 Congressman De La Garza served as chairman of the Congressional Agriculture Committee and had influential roles in overhauling the agricultural lending system, implementing federal farm crop insurance, reforming commodity futures, reorganizing the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and providing aid packages for American and international agriculture.

Congressman De La Garza co-founded the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and helped ensure broad representation when decisions were made. A skilled and multilingual communicator, Congressman De La Garza earned his legacy by developing close working relationships with leaders throughout the world.

An expert on national and international law related to agriculture and commerce, Congressman De La Garza played a major role in expanding trade with Japan, the former Soviet Union, China, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and the Far East.

E. Kika De La Garza Fellowship Program



The USDA E. Kika De La Garza Fellowship Program offers faculty from Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) and Hispanic-Serving School Districts (HSSD) the opportunity to work collaboratively with USDA to gain insight into the federal government. This uniquely tailored experience brings together HSI staff and federal executives to address the spectrum of challenges faced in the development of a well-prepared Hispanic workforce.

Fellows spend one week with USDA increasing their understanding of federal programs and opportunities, particularly at the national level, and working to identify and explore mutual collaborative interests. Science fellows have the opportunity to spend a second week collaborating with a USDA research center.

Education Fellows

Education Fellows learn first-hand the mission and programs of USDA by meeting with leadership and staff from each of the Department's agencies. Participants enrich the USDA with their diverse experiences and allow for on-going dialogue regarding the educational challenges facing the Hispanic community.



Venkatesh Balan

University of Houston, Sugar Land, TX

Dr. Venkatesh Balan is an associate professor in the Department of Engineering Technology at the University of Houston. He earned his PhD in biophysical chemistry from the Indian Institute of Technology Madras. His research focuses on producing edible mycelium and mushrooms for food, feed and biomaterials, as well as sequestering carbon dioxide using algae as fertilizer and in processing for fuels, chemicals and animal feed. Balan is currently leading USDA- and Environmental Protection Agency-funded studies. Additionally, he is a co-investigator in several USDA-funded studies, including the development of an automated robotic system for mushroom harvesting, support for small-scale, underserved and limited resource farmers for climate-smart commodities, skills development in synthetic biology for climate-smart and sustainable agriculture, and partnership in elucidating biogeochemical cycling of silicon to improve plant biomass and carbon dioxide sequestration. He is also working on a Department of Energy-funded study to produce algal biomass from wastewater as cotton plant fertilizer to reduce the carbon footprint. His previous work includes producing fuels and chemicals from lignocellulosic biomass. These studies are critical for producing climate-smart products that benefit our environment.



Cynthia Bejarano

New Mexico State University, La Cruces, NM

Dr. Cynthia Bejarano is a regents professor and the College of Arts and Sciences Stan Fulton Endowed Chair at New Mexico State University (NMSU). As a farmworker advocate since 1994, she has worked with several farmworker social service providers and scholars in southern New Mexico and El Paso County. Bejarano serves as the founding principal investigator for the NMSU College Assistance Migrant Program funded through the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Migrant Education. Since 2002, the NMSU College Assistance Migratory Program has served 623 first-year farm-working students at NMSU. Her research and advocacy focus on immigration, migration and gender-based violence and feminicidios at the U.S.-Mexico border. Bejarano has authored numerous peer-reviewed articles and chapters including the following books: *Qué Onda: Urban Youth Culture and Border Identity* (2005) and co-edited *Terrorizing Women: Femicide in the Américas* (2010) and *Frontera Madre(hood): Brown Mothers Challenging Oppression and Transborder Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border* (2024).



Amanda M. Bogden

University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

Amanda Bogden is currently the internship program manager at the Pasquinelli Career Center within the College of Agriculture, Life, and Environmental Sciences (CALES) at the University of Arizona. She is also pursuing her doctoral degree in higher education at the University of Arizona, focusing her research on the career readiness of Latinx students within Hispanic-Serving Institutions within the Colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences. Bogden is leading a grant-funded project called the CALES Internship Navigator Program that aims to provide stipends to first-generation and Pell Grant-eligible students while matching them with industry mentors. The program is tailored to students' individual career aspirations and focuses on building partnerships with local and regional employers to enhance the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) career competencies and expand employer networks. These efforts serve to decrease the gap between first-generation and continuing generation student participation in paid internships within CALES. Upon completion of the program, participating students will have the knowledge and skills to locate and apply for internships, as well as the confidence gained through interactions with their local/regional employer mentors.



Hikmet Budak

Arizona Western College, Yuma, AZ

Dr. Hikmet Budak is a professor in the Department of Agriculture at Arizona Western College. He holds a PhD in plant genetics and breeding as well as a minor in biometry/statistics from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. His research spans a wide range of disciplines across academia and industry worldwide. Throughout his career, he has focused on developing, understanding and applying MultiOmics and CRISPR editing tools for both model and complex plant systems. Currently, Budak is working on projects related to finding and annotating genes that respond to abiotic and biotic stresses, such as micronutrient deficiency, water deficit and insect resistance. He and his team are using wet lab tools such as MultiOmics and CRISPR editing as well as Machine Learning/A.I. tools. They are dedicated to unraveling genomic approaches and developing modern, resilient and highly productive plant systems.



David A. Byrd

Coastal Bend College, Beeville, TX

Dr. David Byrd is the vice president of Student Success and Engagement at Coastal Bend College in Texas. He holds an MS in agricultural education from Texas A&M University and completed his PhD in higher education administration from the College of Education and Human Development at Texas A&M University. Byrd has been elected to Gamma Sigma Delta, Tau Kappa the Golden Key National Honor Society, Phi Kappa Phi and Kappa Delta Pi. Before joining Coastal Bend College, he served as the associate vice president of Student Affairs at Texas State University. Prior to that, he held the position of associate dean for Admissions and Student Services and was an associate professor and researcher in the School of Nursing at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. His research has been published in several top-tier peer-reviewed journals focusing on underrepresented student success in higher education and innovative recruitment practices to attract students of color into high-need career fields. Byrd has also presented his research at over 30 national and regional conferences and was part of the inaugural cohort of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing Diversity Leadership Institute. He looks forward to becoming an advocate for change and growth within STEM in higher education.



Reilly C. Caldwell

Adams State University, Alamosa, CO

Reilly Caldwell graduated from Appalachian State University with a BS in sustainable development, specializing in community, regional and global development. She then pursued further education at Northern Arizona University, obtaining an MA in sustainable communities. Her master's thesis focused on conducting interviews with Arizona food box recipients to gain insight into their perspectives on health, the food pantry and food access. During this time, she also worked as a graduate facilitator supporting undergraduate research on food pantries and food box recipients. Presently, Caldwell serves as the food studies program coordinator and as a lecturer at Adams State University in rural Colorado. Caldwell is deeply passionate about food access and dedicated to promoting sustainability across the entire food sector, from seed to table. She also leads the internship team and is committed to providing meaningful internship experiences to students. She is eager to explore new opportunities to better support her students and to learn different approaches to creating a more sustainable and equitable food system.



Denise M. Crosswhite

California State University, Chico / Chico State, Chico, CA

Denise Crosswhite is the coordinator for the Student Success and Retention Office in the College of Agriculture at California State University, Chico (Chico State). She has a BA in organizational communication and an MA in sociology from Chico State and has over two decades of experience in higher education. Crosswhite specializes in supporting first-generation and underrepresented students and works to help students succeed both academically and personally. She develops tailored programs to provide a strong foundation for student success inside and outside the classroom. In addition to her work with student success, Crosswhite is a strong advocate for diversity and inclusion. She actively works to recruit a diverse student body, believing in the transformative power of a varied student population. As the landscape of agriculture changes, and the demographics of students shifts, she looks forward to building relationships with USDA and other partners to identify resources that will further support students at Chico State.



Lauren M. Dinour

Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ

Dr. Lauren Dinour is an assistant professor and director of the Didactic Program in Dietetics in the Department of Nutrition and Food Studies at Montclair State University. She holds an MPH in public health nutrition from Hunter College and a DrPH in public health nutrition from the CUNY Graduate Center. Dinour is a registered dietitian nutritionist and certified lactation counselor. Her research broadly focuses on the structural determinants of human milk feeding and food security. She teaches courses on breastfeeding and human lactation, community nutrition, and nutrition assessment. Dinour is the program associate director and Montclair site director of TRANSCEND, a traineeship funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration that supports underrepresented graduate nutrition students in becoming future leaders in maternal and child health nutrition. Over the last four years, Dinour has collaborated with university staff to submit, receive and administer three grants from the State of New Jersey to support hunger-fighting efforts and continue food security surveillance on Montclair's campus. She also serves as the Community-Engaged Teaching and Learning (CETL) Scholar for Montclair's CETL Fellows Program, a bi-annual cohort of approximately 15 faculty and staff who seek to incorporate community engagement in their teaching, research or programs.



Maria Consuelo Donato Molina

Texas A&M University-Kingsville, Kingsville, TX

Dr. Consuelo Donato-Molina is an assistant professor of research and instruction in the Department of Agriculture, Agribusiness, and Environmental Sciences at Texas A&M University-Kingsville (TAMUK), which is a Hispanic-Serving Institution. Her research focuses on critical education areas for USDA, particularly in providing underrepresented student populations with experiential learning and career opportunities within USDA. Donato-Molina serves as the USDA grants program manager and coordinator at the Kleberg College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at TAMUK, a position she has held for over a decade. During this time, she has been instrumental in recruiting, placing and managing an average of 50 undergraduate student interns per year, facilitating their placement in USDA agencies across the nation. She holds a PhD in Hispanic studies, an MS in rural development, and a BS in agricultural engineering. Donato-Molina was also a USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture's Agriculture and Food Research Initiative-Education and Literacy Initiative postdoctoral fellow for recruitment, retention and career success. Donato-Molina is a native of Colombia and has held various positions there, including advisor to the secretary of Agriculture and Rural Development, vice-director of the National Institute of Rural Development, advisor to the general director of the National Land-Use Institute, and environmental restoration consultant in Brazil.



Jose Michael Gaspar

Mesa Community College, Mesa, AZ

Jose Michael Gaspar is the program director of Sustainable Agriculture & Landscape Horticulture at Mesa Community College. With over 15 years of experience in agricultural education and program leadership, he has a strong background in developing innovative curricula, managing agriculture programs, and supervising faculty. Gaspar is dedicated to preparing students for careers in agriculture. At Mesa Community College, he is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the program, including curriculum development, student recruitment, controlled environment agriculture systems, and organic farming. He has successfully secured grant funding for urban agriculture programs and remains actively involved in the agricultural community. Gaspar has served as the past president of the Arizona Agriculture Teachers Association and is a member of the National Association of Agricultural Educators. His previous roles include agriculture science teacher and CTE department head, showcasing his diverse experience within the field.



Belen M. Gonzales

Hartnell College, Salinas, CA

Belen Gonzales is the director of the Career and Transfer Hub at Hartnell College, with over 18 years of experience in higher education specializing in academic affairs, student services and administration. In this role she oversees a center providing career and transfer services to students, builds relationships with faculty and industry partners, supports steering committees, and facilitates work-based learning opportunities. She is dedicated to empowering and supporting students by offering practical tools for real-life situations and broadening their horizons. Gonzales is actively involved in securing and managing grants focused on innovative work-based learning strategies and educational projects. Notably, she oversees a grant initiative funded by the Hispanic-Serving Institutions Education Grants Program, establishing an agricultural-mechatronics career pipeline for underserved students, and serves as co-program director for two grants funded by the USDA NextGen program. Gonzales' prior experience includes nine years of curriculum and scheduling work along with a background in working with special populations and the development of outreach programs with K-12 partners. She holds a BS from Sacramento State and is in the process of completing her master's in College Administration and Leadership.



J.E. Jason Headrick

Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX

Dr. Jason Headrick is an assistant professor of leadership and community development in the Department of Agricultural Education & Communications at the Davis College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at Texas Tech University (TTU). He obtained his BS in agricultural communications and MS in community and leadership development from the University of Kentucky, and he completed his PhD at the University of Nebraska in human sciences with a concentration in leadership studies. His research focuses on leadership and inclusion pedagogy, civic leadership and rural community development. Headrick is leading a research team focusing on West Texas communities and seeking to gain a deeper understanding of the rural experience. Additionally, he is a co-principal investigator on a USDA Women & Minorities in STEM grant providing the Science, Engagement and Leadership Academy (SELA) experience for underserved community college students, in collaboration with faculty mentors to broaden STEM understanding in the agricultural field. At TTU, he serves as the director of the Civic Leadership Academy and co-advisor for the TTU Chapter of Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Natural Resources (MANRRS).



Joe Hinton

Harold Washington College - City Colleges of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Joe Hinton has served as the associate dean of Career Programs since February 2022. In this role, he offers guidance to the Career Development and Student Activities Departments and contributes to college-wide initiatives aimed at promoting student retention. Hinton also conducts college-wide assessments and collaborates with the Chicago Roadmap Project. In addition, he serves as the advisor to the Harold Washington College Pride Alliance. Prior to this role, he worked as an assistant professor of geography in the Social and Applied Sciences Department at Harold Washington College and as a researcher at the University of Wisconsin, focusing on questions of health equity and the built environment. Hinton obtained his BA in history from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and his MA in geography from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. He is currently pursuing his EdD with an emphasis in environmental sustainability education from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.



Rafael Landaverde

Texas A&M University, College Station, TX

Dr. Rafael Landaverde is an assistant professor of agricultural leadership, education and communication in the College of Agriculture & Life Sciences at Texas A&M University. His research explores the environmental and social performance of agricultural systems. He is especially interested in understanding how farmers and other agricultural stakeholders respond to external influences such as environmental changes, scientific innovations and human migration. Currently, he is researching levels of farmer preparedness to respond to climate-related natural disasters in the United States and abroad, as well as their openness to adopting innovative farming technologies that could mitigate their vulnerability to climate-related challenges. Landaverde teaches program evaluation, research method, and global agricultural issues courses for undergraduate and graduate students. Originally from El Salvador, he completed his BS in socioeconomic development and environment at Zamorano University in Honduras. After graduation, he worked in private agricultural production in Ecuador. He completed an internship at the University of Florida's agroecology program then earned his MSc in agricultural education and a graduate certificate in global food security at Texas Tech University. In 2022 Landaverde graduated with his PhD in agricultural communication, education and leadership from Ohio State University. In his current role, Landaverde is invested in preparing and supporting the next generation of agriculture and natural resources professionals. He is the program leader for a project funded by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service to increase student preparedness and participation in agricultural and natural resources state and federal careers.



Allyssa McKenney

Maricopa County Community Colleges, Tempe, AZ

Alyssa McKenney serves as a regional coordinator for the HSI EXCELLENCE program at Maricopa Community College District Office in Arizona. HSI EXCELLENCE is a grant-funded student support initiative that prioritizes addressing the unique challenges faced by Hispanic students at Maricopa Community Colleges, a 10-college HSI District. A first-generation college graduate, McKenney completed her undergraduate studies at Glendale Community College and Northern Arizona University. She will commence with an MEd in human relations from Northern Arizona University in December 2024. Beginning her career as a student worker in student affairs, she discovered her call to action: Serving her community through the power of education by implementing creative solutions to barriers that prevent students from completing their degrees, transferring to a university, or entering the workforce. In the last 12 years, McKenney has created, implemented and coordinated four successful and sustainable student retention programs intentionally designed to meet the needs of all community college students with a deliberate focus on uplifting underrepresented, high-promise students. Earlier this year, two of the programs she developed or coordinated were acknowledged by the Arizona HSI Consortium as evidence-based practices.



Liliana Oliveira

University of Connecticut , Storrs, CT

Liliana Oliveira serves as an adjunct professor in women, gender and sexuality studies as well as the program coordinator for the USDA NextGen program at the University of Connecticut's regional campuses in Waterbury and Stamford within the College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources. Holding an MA in international studies with a focus on Latin American Studies alongside a certificate in gender studies, her academic pursuits and research center on inclusive pedagogy and media representation of underrepresented groups, with a commitment to advancing equity for marginalized communities within higher education spaces. As a program coordinator, she provides support to Hispanic-Serving Institutions and spearheads a program to facilitate equitable access to fields such as food, health and natural resources. Alongside her administrative duties, she teaches courses on social justice issues and cultural studies, emphasizing inclusive readings of media representations.



Franklin Ortega Palaguachi

Waubonsee Community College, Aurora, IL

Dr. Franklin Ortega Palaguachi is a dedicated advocate for the Latinx community and student success, currently serving as the inaugural Latinx Resource Center manager at Waubonsee Community College. Born and raised in Ecuador, he was the first person in his family to attend college and now holds a BA in Latino and Latin American studies, an MA in educational leadership with a focus on higher education administration from Northeastern Illinois University, and a certificate in diversity and inclusion from Cornell University. He is also advancing through his third year in a PhD program in higher education leadership at Colorado State University. His commitment to student retention and success shows in his leadership of academic initiatives, multicultural programming, STEM projects, and life coaching for underserved students. He also leads strategic collaborations under the Title V grant for Hispanic-Serving Institutions that foster partnerships with off-campus communities and integrate various student development and academic departments and faculty units within Waubonsee. He actively participates in all HSI and student engagement efforts to build an inclusive and supportive college environment.



Kitchka P. Petrova

Northern Arizona University, Yuma, AZ

Dr. Kitchka Petrova joined the Northern Arizona University – Yuma branch campus as an assistant teaching professor in Fall of 2022. She is associated with the Department of Teaching and Learning at the university's College of Education. Petrova received a BS in biology and microbiology from Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, a PhD in microbiology from Moscow University M.V. Lomonosov, and a PhD in education policy and evaluation from Florida State University. She worked as a science researcher and educator in Bulgaria and the U.S. As a former science teacher, Petrova developed a project on biotechnology and agriculture to introduce her students to the importance of agriculture. From 2019-2021 she served as an AAAS Science & Technology Fellow at the National Science Foundation, where she designed evaluation studies, organized review panels, and managed programs. Today she teaches education foundations courses to future elementary school teachers and microbiology to science majors. Her research focuses on investigating the perceptions of preservice elementary school teachers about teaching science interdisciplinary and using project-based learning in microbiology undergraduate courses.



Mayra Puente

University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, CA

Dr. Mayra Puente is an assistant professor of higher education at the Gevirtz Graduate School of Education at the University of California, Santa Barbara. She obtained her PhD in education from University of California, San Diego and her BA in political science with a concentration in race, ethnicity and politics from University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Additionally, she double minored in education studies and Chicana/o studies at UCLA. Puente's diverse educational background has influenced her interdisciplinary approach to higher education research. Her main focus is on college access, choice, transition, retention and success issues for rural Latinx students from migrant farm working backgrounds employs critical race, feminista, and spatial perspectives and methodological approaches. She recently co-developed the Platicando y Mapeando methodology in educational research to examine the intersections of race, gender, space and educational (in) opportunity. In recognition of her significant contributions to higher education research, she was awarded the 2024 American Educational Research Association Division J: Postsecondary Education Outstanding Publication Award.



Jennifer C. Schriber

Cuesta College, Paso Robles, CA

Jennifer Schriber is an associate faculty member in the Department of Agriculture Plant Science at Cuesta College in Paso Robles, California, and the Department of Biology at San Jose City College in San Jose, California. She holds an MS in tropical plant and soil science from the University of Hawaii at Manoa and an MEd from Endicott College. With over fifteen years of experience teaching science at various educational levels, including middle and high school as well as community college, Jennifer is deeply passionate about education. She loves teaching and values being part of a diverse, supportive community. As an educator, Jennifer is dedicated to empowering her students to achieve their educational goals and become active community members. She strives to help students recognize their full potential and succeed in their endeavors. Outside the classroom, Jennifer contributes to environmental conservation efforts by assisting Greenspace, a local non-profit organization in Cambria, California, with restoration projects for *Pinus radiata*, the Monterey Pine.

High School Fellows

High School Fellowships are for secondary education superintendents, principals, agricultural and/or district level teachers working for a Hispanic-Serving School District. These fellows also meet with leadership and staff from USDA agencies to learn first-hand about the Department’s mission and programs.



Curtis “Curt” L. Guaglianone

Mt. Adams School District #209, White Swan, WA

Dr. Curt Guaglianone currently serves as the superintendent of the Mt. Adams School District, located on the Yakama Indian Reservation and including the communities of Harrah, Brownstown and White Swan in Washington. He was raised in central California and has always been committed to a life of service. With over 30 years of experience in education, Guaglianone has held various positions, including high school teacher, community college and university professor, associate dean, dean and provost across five Hispanic Serving Institutions in California and Washington. He also holds the title of dean emeritus from the College of Education at California State University, Bakersfield. Notable achievements during his tenure include securing funding for a new school building without incurring voted debt, improving attendance rates, enhancing student academic performance, implementing inclusionary service delivery, and fostering strong relationships with the Yakama Nation and partners across Washington state to better meet the needs of all students in the district.



Robert William Markuske

Urban Assembly New York Harbor School, Governors Island, New York City, NY

Robert Markuske is the marine affairs Instructor and sustainability coordinator at the Urban Assembly New York Harbor School. He holds an MS from Brooklyn College in social studies adolescent education and is certified to teach social studies in New York State. In addition, he is certified to teach natural resources and ecology due to his previous professional experiences with the National Park Service and environmental nonprofit organizations. Markuske designs and facilitates a multidisciplinary course that takes an interdisciplinary approach to addressing sustainability issues. He also leads an education program that combines practical and academic elements to tackle urban coastal challenges. He uses place-based learning and real-life strategies to help students investigate and collect quantitative and qualitative data on sustainability issues. For example, his students are seeking to better manage stormwater and improve air quality through urban greening and to mitigate waste through composting. His students are actively engaged in managing a 70- by 30-foot green space, two commercial hydroponic systems, and 20 micro hydroponic systems used for growing food for both themselves and their communities.



Patrycja Zbrzezny

John Bowne High School, Flushing, NY

Patrycja Zbrzezny serves as the assistant principal of supervision at the Animal, Plant, and Agriscience Institute of John Bowne High School. She holds a BS in animal science with a concentration in farm productivity and management from Rutgers University, Cook College and an MEd in agricultural education from the Rutgers University Graduate School of Education. Additionally, she completed her School-Based Leadership certification at the College of Saint Rose. Zbrzezny oversees the largest agricultural education program in New York State and the only comprehensive program of its kind in New York City. As an alumna of the program, she is deeply committed to the importance of agricultural education for youth and strives to provide extensive opportunities for her 500 agriculture students. She collaborates with local and state organizations as well as agricultural colleges and universities to expose students to various fields within the agriculture industry. In her current role, Zbrzezny is responsible for supervising an eight-teacher department, managing the school's four-acre farm, coordinating work-based learning experiences, overseeing the functions of the school's agricultural shop, and handling other administrative duties. Graduates of her program pursue careers as veterinarians, educators, politicians, florists, veterinary technicians, horticulturalists and more.

Science Fellows

Science Fellows collaborate with leading scientists from either USDA's Agricultural Research Service, Food Safety and Inspection Service, or Forest Service during an additional week at one of their research facilities. Participants learn about state-of-the-art agricultural research that solves problems.

Fellows share their expertise with students at their respective HSIs, motivating students to pursue careers in agriculture, science, research and technology.

Mark Eppinger

University of Texas at San Antonio, South Texas Center For Emerging Infectious Diseases, San Antonio, TX

Dr. Mark Eppinger is an associate professor of microbial genomics in the Department of Molecular Microbiology and Immunology at the University of Texas at San Antonio. His laboratory is also affiliated with the South Texas Center for Emerging Infectious Diseases. He earned his MS and PhD degrees from the Eberhard-Karls University of Tuebingen and the Max Planck Institute in Germany. He then underwent postdoctoral training at the Pennsylvania State University, The Institute for Genomic Research, and the University of Maryland School of Medicine. The focus of Eppinger's research is on microbial pathogens with a foodborne origin, both of which pose a significant threat to public health. The laboratory investigates the evolution of pathogenomes and the pathogenic potential of human pathogenic microbes, their diversity, and the interaction between host and infectious agent. The integration of virulence with genome-scale information helps in identifying evolutionary trajectories and provides potential targets applicable for improved biosurveillance and risk assessment. The Eppinger laboratory has identified hypervirulent clones of circulating Shiga toxin (Stx) producing Escherichia coli. These clones have increased Stx-production capabilities. The research focuses on understanding how the core genome and accessory Stx-bacteriophage loci contribute to a strain's individual pathogenic potential and cytotoxicity.



Ivan L. Guzman

New York City College of Technology, Brooklyn, NY

Dr. Ivan Guzman is an assistant professor at New York City College of Technology (City Tech). He earned his PhD in geotechnical engineering from New York University and has over 12 years of professional experience in soil mechanics and geotechnical engineering. Guzman has worked as a senior engineer and project manager on various government and private sector projects in the United States and the Caribbean, focusing on geotechnical, structural and environmental engineering as well as materials testing. His research interests include green roofs, sustainability, transparent soils, and dynamic soil penetration. Currently Guzman is studying the effects of using re-purposed fibers to modify the hydrogeological properties of green roof soils, addressing the challenge of green roofs withstanding additional structural loads. He has involved undergraduate research assistants in conducting laboratory testing as part of his research. Additionally, Guzman aims to educate urban students at City Tech about the socioeconomic importance of agriculture and the benefits of urban farming through his research.





Akira Kawamura

Hunter College of CUNY, New York, NY

Dr. Akira Kawamura earned his BS in chemistry from The University of Tokyo and his PhD in chemistry from Columbia University. After completing postdoctoral training in bioorganic chemistry at The Scripps Research Institute in La Jolla, CA, he became an associate professor and chair of the Chemistry Department at Hunter College of CUNY in New York City. At Hunter College, Akira has established a research program focused on natural product chemistry. His work includes the structural and biological characterization of shark-repelling agents, phytohormones, cardiotoxic steroids, immune-boosting lipids, python-derived bile acids and microbial communication factors. He is currently the principal investigator of a National Institute of Health-funded research project on immunostimulatory glycolipids for developing vaccine adjuvants. As the chair of the Chemistry Department, he successfully led over 30 faculty and staff members through the challenging COVID-19 pandemic. Under his guidance, the department has strengthened its research and educational programs, securing over \$3 million in external research funding annually and catering to thousands of students, including nearly 500 chemistry/biochemistry majors.



Amir Ali Khoddamzadeh

Florida International University, Miami, FL

Dr. Amir Ali Khoddamzadeh has been an assistant professor at the Department of Earth and Environment in Florida International University since Fall 2015. He is a core member of the Agroecology Program and is affiliated with the International Centre for Tropical Botany at the Kampong Botanic Garden. He also holds an honorary affiliation with the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden. Khoddamzadeh recently completed his sabbatical leave at the USDA Agricultural Research Center's Subtropical Horticulture Research Station in Miami. His lab focuses on best management practices to support informed decision-making regarding in botanic gardens, gene banks, the private sector, and the nursery production industry. In addition to his research, Khoddamzadeh has developed various courses, including horticulture, modern crop production, precision agriculture, and sustainability in action. He has secured close to \$5 million in funding from USDA, the National Science Foundation, and other private foundations and industry partners. He has mentored over 60 undergraduate students and more than 12 graduate students, the majority of whom are Hispanic.



Cynthia Klobodu

California State University, Chico, Chico, CA

Dr. Cynthia Klobodu is an assistant professor in the Department of Nutrition and Food Science at California State University, Chico. She holds a PhD in nutrition sciences and is a trained public health physician. Her research focuses on the relationship between nutrition and disease, with implications for public health policy and practice. She has a particular interest in fertility nutrition, global nutrition, women's wellness and maternal and child health. Currently, Klobodu is leading the Fertility, Cancer, Nutrition and Diet (FECAND) Study, which aims to develop a dietary intervention to support female cancer survivors undergoing fertility treatments. She is also the lead investigator for a study examining the dietary quality and patterns of college students at Chico State.



Santanu Maitra

California State University Fresno, Fresno, CA

Dr. Santanu Maitra is a professor in the Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry at California State University (CSU), Fresno, where he teaches organic chemistry and medicinal chemistry courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. His research focuses on Alzheimer's drug discovery, pest repellent development, and antifungal drug exploration. Before joining academia at CSU Fresno in 2008, Maitra spent eight years in the pharmaceutical industry, both in the USA and in India. In Santanu's lab, an unconventional hypothesis on Alzheimer's drug discovery research resulted in several small organic lead compounds with the potential for further development. Additionally, his team is working on an agricultural project to develop a repellent for the destructive Spotted Wing Drosophila (SWD) pest and has identified several promising leads with excellent repellent profiles toward fruit flies. Research conducted by students in his laboratory has resulted in four patents. The team's efforts to pursue Alzheimer's research have been significantly enhanced by National Institute of Health grant support, allowing them to work with greater rigor and at a faster pace. The lead candidates in the pest repellent project will undergo SWD repellent evaluation later this year with private support.



Subhankar Mandal

Arizona State University, Mesa, AZ

Dr. Subhankar Mandal is an assistant professor of sustainable horticulture at the Arizona State University (ASU) School of Applied Sciences and Arts, which he joined in the fall of 2023. Mandal earned an MS and PhD in plant and environmental science from New Mexico State University in 2021. His research at ASU focuses on sustainable vegetable production and management for urban and peri-urban cropping systems. His goals include evaluating organic soil amendments for nutrient availability, identifying adaptive phenotypes, and studying multi-omics responses under water deficit and salt stresses. Prior to joining ASU, Mandal was a senior innovation scientist at Sensient Natural Ingredients LLC. in California, where he developed proprietary onion varieties for the dehydration industry. He also has experience teaching undergraduate courses as a parttime lecturer and graduate teaching assistant at California State University - Stanislaus and New Mexico State University, respectively. Before coming to the United States, Mandal obtained an MS as an All-India Junior Research Fellow from the Punjab Agricultural University and worked as a research associate in the All-India Coordinated Vegetable Improvement Projects.



Rosalyn A. Shim

Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX

Dr. Rosalyn A. Shim is an associate professor in the Department of Plant and Soil Science at Texas Tech University, where she holds research, teaching and service positions. She earned a BS in biology with a major in genetics and an MS in genetics with a minor in plant breeding from the University of the Philippines. Additionally, she received a PhD in agricultural sciences from Nagoya University in Japan. Her current research aims to address fundamental and applied questions in plant science using classical genetics principles in combination with integrative, omics-based strategies. Specifically, her research focuses on understanding genetic and molecular mechanisms underlying agronomic and adaptive traits in exotic and mutant populations of cotton to facilitate novel gene discovery and precision breeding for trait improvement. She also works with cotton and rice to study chromosome transfer dynamics from exotic to cultivated genetic backgrounds. In rice, she investigates the genetic basis of preferential transmission of chromosome segments from wild rice species into cultivated rice, as well as maternally driven alien chromosome introgressions.



Veerachandra K. Yemmireddy

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley, Edinburg, TX

Dr. Veerachandra “Kranti” Yemmireddy is an assistant professor of food safety and food microbiology in the College of Sciences at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV). Kranti holds a BS degree in food technology from Osmania University, India, as well as MS and PhD degrees in food science from the University of Georgia. He also completed postdoctoral training at Louisiana State University. At UTRGV, Kranti leads an active food safety research program focusing on the microbiological safety of fresh produce and minimally processed foods. His research aims to identify sources of microbial contamination in fresh produce, minimally processed foods, and various food contact and non-food contact surfaces, both before and after harvesting. Additionally, he investigates environmental factors contributing to the emergence of antimicrobial resistance in foodborne bacterial pathogens such as Salmonella, E. coli: H7 and Listeria monocytogenes. The ultimate goal of his research is to develop novel intervention strategies to mitigate associated risks, thereby safeguarding public health. Kranti also collaborates closely with Hispanic growers in South Texas, the fresh produce industry, and other external partners to train the next generation of food safety professionals and communicate science-based information to end users, ultimately impacting the farm-to-fork continuum.

USDA Office of Partnerships and Public Engagement Hispanic-Serving Institutions National Program

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